

ARIADNE FLORENTINA.



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SIX LECTURES

ON

WOOD AND METAL ENGRAVING.

GIVEN BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN MICHAELMAS TERM, 1872.

BY

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IV.—The Technics of Metal Engraving.

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ADVICE.

THE publication of this fourth lecture has been delayed by some re-arrangement of the text which I thought it advisable to make in order to bring the entire series at once into permanent form. There will in consequence be no changes made in subsequent editions, but a supplementary number, containing Appendix and two additional plates, will follow the six lectures already announced, at the same price as the illustrated ones; the entire series, unbound, thus costing its first subscribers only 14*s.* 6*d.* But after the publication of the last number it will be sold only in a bound form, constituting the seventh volume of the general series of my works, at 27*s.* 6*d.* per copy. The difficulty of providing these facsimile woodcuts, and some other of the illustrations, is so great that I must strictly limit the number of copies; and the market price, judging from that of my other books at present out of print, is not likely to fall below my publishing one.

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The Story of FLORENCE.

LECTURE IV.

THE TECHNIQS OF METAL ENGRAVING.

113. WE are to-day to examine the proper methods for the technical management of the most perfect of the arms of precision possessed by the artist. For you will at once understand that a line cut by a finely-pointed instrument upon the smooth surface of metal is susceptible of the utmost fineness that can be given to the *definite* work of the human hand. In drawing with pen upon paper, the surface of the paper is slightly rough; necessarily, two points touch it instead of one, and the liquid flows from them more or less irregularly, whatever the draughtsman's skill. But you cut a metallic surface with one edge only; the furrow drawn by a skater on the surface of ice is like it on a large scale. Your surface is polished, and your line may be wholly faultless, if your hand is.

114. And because, in such material, effects may be produced which no penmanship could rival, most people, I fancy, think that a steel plate half en-

graves itself; that the workman has no trouble with it, compared to that of a pen draughtsman.

To test your feeling in this matter accurately, here is a manuscript book written with pen and ink, and illustrated with flourishes and vignettes.

You will all, I think, be disposed, on examining it, to exclaim, How wonderful! and even to doubt the possibility of every page in the book being completed in the same manner. Again, here are three of my own drawings, executed with the pen, and Indian ink, when I was fifteen. They are copies from large lithographs by Prout; and I imagine that most of my pupils would think me very tyrannical if I requested them to do anything of the kind themselves. And yet, when you see in the shop windows a line engraving like this,* or this,* either of which contains, alone, as much work as fifty pages of the manuscript book, or fifty such drawings as mine, you look upon its effect as quite a matter of course,—you never say ‘how wonderful’ *that* is, nor consider how you would like to have to live, by producing anything of the same kind yourselves.

115. Yet you cannot suppose it is in reality easier

* Miller's large plate of the Grand Canal, Venice, after Turner; and Goodall's, of Tivoli, after Turner. The other examples referred to are left in the University Galleries.

to draw a line with a cutting point, not seeing the effect at all, or, if any effect, seeing a gleam of light instead of darkness, than to draw your black line at once on the white paper? You cannot really think * that there is something complacent, sympathetic, and helpful in the nature of steel; so that while a pen-and-ink sketch may always be considered an achievement proving cleverness in the sketcher, a sketch on steel comes out by mere favour of the indulgent metal; or that the plate is woven like a piece of pattern silk, and the pattern is developed by pasteboard cards punched full of holes? Not so. Look close at this engraving, or take a smaller and simpler one, Turner's Mercury and Argus,—imagine it to be a drawing in pen and ink, and yourself required similarly to produce its parallel! True, the steel point has the one advantage of not blotting, but it has tenfold or twentyfold disadvantage, in that you cannot slur, nor efface, except in a very resolute and laborious way, nor play with it, nor even see what you are doing with it at the moment, far less the effect that is to be. You must *feel* what you are doing with it, and know precisely what you

* This paragraph was not read at the lecture, time not allowing:—it is part of what I wrote on engraving some years ago, in the papers for the Art Journal, called the Cestus of Aglaia.

have got to do; how deep, how broad, how far apart your lines must be, etc. and etc., (a couple of lines of etceteras would not be enough to imply all you must know). But suppose the plate *were* only a pen drawing: take your pen—your finest—and just try to copy the leaves that entangle the head of Io, and her head itself; remembering always that the kind of work required here is mere child's play compared to that of fine figure engraving. Nevertheless, take a small magnifying glass to this—count the dots and lines that gradate the nostrils and the edges of the facial bone; notice how the light is left on the top of the head by the stopping, at its outline, of the coarse touches which form the shadows under the leaves; examine it well, and then—I humbly ask of you—try to do a piece of it yourself! You clever sketcher—you young lady or gentleman of genius—you eye-glassed dilettante—you current writer of criticism royally plural,—I beseech you,—do it yourself; do the merely etched outline yourself, if no more. Look you,—you hold your etching needle this way, as you would a pencil, nearly; and then,—you scratch with it! it is as easy as lying. Or if you think that too difficult, take an easier piece;—take either of the light sprays of foliage that rise against the fortress on the right, pass your lens over them—

look how their fine outline is first drawn, leaf by leaf; then how the distant rock is put in between, with broken lines, mostly stopping before they touch the leaf-outline; and again, I pray you, do it yourself,—if not on that scale, on a larger. Go on into the hollows of the distant rock,—traverse its thickets,—number its towers;—count how many lines there are in a laurel bush—in an arch—in a casement; some hundred and fifty, or two hundred, deliberately drawn lines, you will find, in every square quarter of an inch;—say *three thousand to the inch*,—each, with skilful intent, put in its place! and then consider what the ordinary sketcher's work must appear, to the men who have been trained to this!

116. "But might not more have been done by three thousand lines to a square inch?" you will perhaps ask. Well, possibly. It may be with lines as with soldiers: three hundred, knowing their work thoroughly, may be stronger than three thousand less sure of their aim. We shall have to press close home this question about numbers and purpose presently;—it is not the question now. 'Suppose certain results required,—atmospheric effects, surface textures, transparencies of shade, confusions of light,—then, more could *not* be done with less. There are engravings of this modern school, of

which, with respect to their particular aim, it may be said, most truly, they "cannot be better done."

Here is one just finished,—or, at least, finished to the eyes of ordinary mortals, though its fastidious master means to retouch it;—a quite pure line engraving, by Mr. Charles Henry Jeens; (in calling it pure line, I mean that there are no mixtures of mezzotint or any mechanical tooling, but all is steady hand-work,) from a picture by Mr. Armytage, which, without possessing any of the highest claims to admiration, is yet free from the vulgar vices which disgrace most of our popular religious art; and is so sweet in the fancy of it as to deserve, better than many works of higher power, the pains of the engraver to make it a common possession. It is meant to help us to imagine the evening of the day when the father and mother of Christ had been seeking him through Jerusalem: they have come to a well where women are drawing water; St. Joseph passes on,—but the tired Madonna, leaning on the well's margin, asks wistfully of the women if they have seen such and such a child astray. Now will you just look for a while into the lines by which the expression of the weary and anxious face is rendered; see how unerring they are,—how calm and clear; and think how many questions have

to be determined in drawing the most minute portion of any one,—its curve,—its thickness,—its distance from the next,—its own preparation for ending, invisibly, where it ends. Think what the precision must be in these that trace the edge of the lip, and make it look quivering with disappointment, or in these which have made the eyelash heavy with restrained tears.

117. Or if, as must be the case with many of my audience, it is impossible for you to conceive the difficulties here overcome, look merely at the draperies, and other varied substances represented in the plate; see how silk, and linen, and stone, and pottery, and flesh, are all separated in texture, and gradated in light, by the most subtle artifices and appliances of line,—of which artifices, and the nature of the mechanical labour throughout, I must endeavour to give you to-day a more distinct conception than you are in the habit of forming. But as I shall have to blame some of these methods in their general result, and I do not wish any word of general blame to be associated with this most excellent and careful plate by Mr. Jeens, I will pass, for special examination, to one already in your reference series, which for the rest exhibits more various treatment in its combined landscape, background, and figures; the Belle Jardinière of

Raphael, drawn and engraved by the Baron Desmoyers.

You see, in the first place, that the ground, stones, and other coarse surfaces are distinguished from the flesh and draperies by broken and wriggled lines. Those broken lines cannot be executed with the burin, they are etched in the early states of the plate, and are a modern artifice, never used by old engravers; partly because the older men were not masters of the art of etching, but chiefly because even those who were acquainted with it would not employ lines of this nature. They have been developed by the importance of landscape in modern engraving, and have produced some valuable results in small plates, especially of architecture. But they are entirely erroneous in principle, for the surface of stones and leaves is not broken or jagged in this manner, but consists of mossy, or blooming, or otherwise organic texture, which cannot be represented by these coarse lines; their general consequence has therefore been to withdraw the mind of the observer from all beautiful and tender characters in foreground, and eventually to destroy the very school of landscape engraving which gave birth to them.

Considered, however, as a means of relieving more delicate textures, they are in some degree legiti-

mate, being, in fact, a kind of chasing or jaggings one part of the plate surface in order to throw out the delicate tints from the rough field. But the same effect was produced with less pains, and far more entertainment to the eye, by the older engravers, who employed purely ornamental variations of line; thus in Plate IV., opposite page 123, the drapery is sufficiently distinguished from the grass by the treatment of the latter as an ornamental arabesque. The grain of wood is elaborately engraved by Marc Antonio, with the same purpose, in the plate given in your Standard Series.

118. Next, however, you observe what difference of texture and force exists between the smooth, continuous lines themselves, which are all really *engraved*. You must take some pains to understand the nature of this operation.

The line is first cut lightly through its whole course, by absolute decision and steadiness of hand, which you may endeavour to imitate if you like, in its simplest phase, by drawing a circle with your compass-pen; and then, grasping your penholder so that you can push the point like a plough, describing other circles inside or outside of it, in exact parallelism with the mathematical line, and at exactly equal distances. To approach, or depart, with your point at finely gradated intervals, may

be your next exercise, if you find the first unexpectedly easy.

119. When the line is thus described in its proper course, it is ploughed deeper, where depth is needed, by a second cut of the burin, first on one side, then on the other, the cut being given with graduated force so as to take away most steel where the line is to be darkest. Every line of graduated depth in the plate has to be thus cut eight or ten times over at least, with retouchings to smooth and clear all in the close. Jason has to plough his field ten-furrow deep, with his fiery oxen well in hand, all the while.

When the essential lines are thus produced, in their several directions, those which have been drawn across each other, so as to give depth of shade, or richness of texture, have to be farther enriched by dots in the interstices; else there would be a painful appearance of network everywhere; and these dots require each four or five jags to produce them; and each of these jags must be done with what artists and engravers alike call 'feeling,'—the sensibility, that is, of a hand completely under mental government. So wrought, the dots look soft, and like touches of paint; but mechanically dug in, they are vulgar and hard.

120. Now, observe, that, for every piece of shadow throughout the work, the engraver has to decide with what quantity and kind of line he will produce it. Exactly the same quantity of black, and therefore the same depth of tint in general effect, may be given with six thick lines; or with twelve, of half their thickness; or with eighteen, of a third of the thickness. The second six, second twelve, or second eighteen, may cross the first six, first twelve, or first eighteen, or go between them; and they may cross at any angle. And then the third six may be put between the first six, or between the second six, or across both, and at any angle. In the network thus produced, any kind of dots may be put in the severally shaped interstices. And for any of the series of superadded lines, dots, of equivalent value in shade, may be substituted. (Some engravings are wrought in dots altogether.) Choice infinite, with multiplication of infinity, is, at all events, to be made, for every minute space, from one side of the plate to the other.

121. The excellence of a beautiful engraving is primarily in the use of these resources to exhibit the qualities of the original picture, with delight to the eye in the method of translation; and the language of engraving, when once you begin to understand it, is, in these respects, so fertile, so

ingenious, so ineffably subtle and severe in its grammar, that you may quite easily make it the subject of your life's investigation, as you would the scholarship of a lovely literature.

But in doing this, you would withdraw, and necessarily withdraw, your attention from the higher qualities of art, precisely as a grammarian, who is that, and nothing more, loses command of the matter and substance of thought. And the exquisitely mysterious mechanisms of the engraver's method have, in fact, thus entangled the intelligence of the careful draughtsmen of Europe; so that since the final perfection of this translator's power, all the men of finest patience and finest hand have stayed content with it;—the subtlest draughtsmanship has perished from the canvas,* and sought more popular praise in this labyrinth of disciplined language, and more or less dulled or degraded thought. And, in sum, I know no cause more direct or fatal, in the destruction of the great schools of European art, than the perfectness of modern line engraving.

122. This great and profoundly to be regretted influence I will prove and illustrate to you on another occasion. My object to-day is to explain

* An effort has lately been made in France, by Meissonier, Gérôme, and their school, to recover it, with marvellous collateral skill of engravers. The etching of Gérôme's Louis XIV. and Molière is one of the completest pieces of skilful mechanism ever put on metal.

the perfectness of the art itself; and above all to request you, if you will not look at pictures instead of photographs, at least not to allow the cheap merits of the chemical operation to withdraw your interest from the splendid human labour of the engraver. Here is a little vignette from Stothard, for instance, in Rogers' poems, to the lines,

"Soared in the swing, half pleased and half afraid,
'Neath sister elms, that waved their summer shade."

You would think, would you not? (and rightly,) that of all difficult things to express with crossed black lines and dots, the face of a young girl must be the most difficult. Yet here you have the face of a bright girl, radiant in light, transparent, mysterious, almost breathing,—her dark hair involved in delicate wreath and shade, her eyes full of joy and sweet playfulness,—and all this done by the exquisite order and gradation of a very few lines, which, if you will examine them through a lens, you find dividing and chequering the lip, and cheek, and chin, so strongly that you would have fancied they could only produce the effect of a grim iron mask. But the intelligences of order and form guide them into beauty, and inflame them with delicatest life.

123. And do you see the size of this head?
About as large as the bud of a forget-me-not!

Can you imagine the fineness of the little pressures of the hand on the steel, in that space, which at the edge of the almost invisible lip, fashioned its less or more of smile?

My chemical friends, if you wish ever to know anything rightly concerning the arts, I very urgently advise you to throw all your vials and washes down the gutter-trap; and if you will ascribe, as you think it so clever to do, in your modern creeds, all virtue to the sun, use that virtue through your own heads and fingers, and apply your solar energies to draw a skilful line or two, for once or twice in your life. You may learn more by trying to engrave, like Goodall, the tip of an ear, or the curl of a lock of hair, than by photographing the entire population of the United States of America,—black, white, and neutral-tint.

And one word, by the way, touching the complaints I hear at my having set you to so fine work that it hurts your eyes. You have noticed that all great sculptors—and most of the great painters of Florence—began by being goldsmiths. Why do you think the goldsmith's apprenticeship is so fruitful? Primarily, because it forces the boy to do small work, and mind what he is about. Do you suppose Michael Angelo learned his business by dashing or hitting at it? He laid the founda-

tion of all his after power by doing precisely what I am requiring my own pupils to do,—copying German engravings in facsimile! And for your eyes—you all sit up at night till you haven't got any eyes worth speaking of. Go to bed at half-past nine, and get up at four, and you'll see something out of them, in time.

124 Nevertheless, whatever admiration you may be brought to feel, and with justice, for this lovely workmanship,—the more distinctly you comprehend its merits, the more distinctly also will the question rise in your mind, How is it that a performance so marvellous has yet taken no rank in the records of art of any permanent or acknowledged kind? How is it that these vignettes from Stothard and Turner,* like the woodcuts from Tenniel, scarcely make the name of the engraver known; and that they never are found side by side with this older and apparently

* I must again qualify the too sweeping statement of the text. I think, as time passes, some of these nineteenth century line engravings will become monumental. The first vignette of the garden, with the cut hedges and fountain, for instance, in Rogers' poems, is so consummate in its use of every possible artifice of delicate line, (note the look of *tremulous* atmosphere got by the undulatory etched lines on the pavement, and the broken masses, worked with dots, of the fountain foam,) that I think it cannot but, with some of its companions, survive the refuse of its school, and become classic. I find in like manner, even with all their faults and weaknesses, the vignettes to Heyne's Virgil to be real art-possession.

runder art, in the cabinets of men of real judgment. The reason is precisely the same as in the case of the Tenniel woodcut. This modern line engraving is alloyed gold. Rich in capacity, astonishing in attainment, it nevertheless admits wilful fault, and misses what it ought first to have attained. It is therefore, to a certain measure, vile in its perfection; while the older work is noble even in its failure, and classic no less in what it deliberately refuses, than in what it rationally and rightly prefers and performs.

125. Here, for instance, I have enlarged the head of one of Durer's Madonnas for you out of one of his most careful plates.* You think it very ugly. Well, so it is. Don't be afraid to think so, nor to say so. Frightfully ugly; vulgar also. It is the head, simply, of a fat Dutch girl, with all the pleasantness left out. There is not the least doubt about that. Don't let anybody force Albert Durer down your throats; nor make you expect pretty things from him. Stothard's young girl in the swing, or Sir Joshua's Age of Innocence, are in quite angelic spheres of another world, compared to this black domain of poor, laborious Albert. We are not talking of female beauty, so please you, just now, gentlemen, but of engraving. And the merit, the classical, indefeasible,

* Plate 11th, in the Appendix, taken from the engraving of the Virgin sitting in the fenced garden, with two angels crowning her.

immortal merit of this head of a Dutch girl with all the beauty left out, is in the fact that every line of it, as engraving, is as good as can be;—good, not with the mechanical dexterity of a watchmaker, but with the intellectual effort and sensitiveness of an artist who knows precisely what can be done, and ought to be attempted, with his assigned materials. He works easily, fearlessly, flexibly; the dots are not all measured in distance; the lines not all mathematically parallel or divergent. He has even missed his mark at the mouth in one place, and leaves the mistake, frankly. But there are no petrified mistakes; nor is the eye so accustomed to the look of the mechanical furrow as to accept it for final excellence. The engraving is full of the painter's higher power and wider perception; it is classically perfect, because duly subordinate, and presenting for your applause only the virtues proper to its own sphere. Among these, I must now reiterate, the first of all is the *decorative* arrangement of *lines*.

126. You all know what a pretty thing a damask tablecloth is, and how a pattern is brought out by threads running one way in one space, and across in another. So, in lace, a certain delightfulness is given by the texture of meshed lines.

Similarly, on any surface of metal, the object of the engraver is, or ought to be, to cover it with lovely

lines, forming a lacework, and including a variety of spaces, delicious to the eye.

And this is his business, primarily; before any other matter can be thought of, his work must be ornamental. You know I told you a sculptor's business is first to cover a surface with pleasant *bosses*, whether they mean anything or not; so an engraver's is to cover it with pleasant *lines*, whether they mean anything or not. That they should mean something, and a good deal of something, is indeed desirable afterwards; but first we must be ornamental.

127. Now if you will compare Plate II. at the beginning of this lecture, which is a characteristic example of good Florentine engraving, and represents the Planet and power of Aphrodite, with the Aphrodite of Bewick in the upper division of Plate I., you will at once understand the difference between a primarily ornamental, and a primarily realistic, style. The first requirement in the Florentine work, is that it shall be a lovely arrangement of lines; a pretty thing upon a page. Bewick *has* a secondary notion of making his vignette a pretty thing upon a page. But he is overpowered by his vigorous veracity, and bent first on giving you his idea of Venus. Quite right, he would have been, mind you, if he had been carving a statue of her

on Mount Eryx; but not when he was engraving a vignette to *Æsop's fables*. To engrave well is to ornament a surface well, not to create a realistic impression. I beg your pardon for my repetitions; but the point at issue is the root of the whole business, and I *must* get it well asserted, and variously.

Let me pass to a more important example.

128. Three years ago, in the rough first arrangement of the copies in the Educational Series, I put an outline of the top of Apollo's sceptre, which, in the catalogue, was said to be probably by Baccio Bandini of Florence, for your first real exercise; it remains so, the olive being put first only for its mythological rank.

The series of engravings to which the plate from which that exercise is copied belongs, are part of a number, executed chiefly, I think, from early designs of Sandro Botticelli, and some in great part by his hand. He and his assistant, Baccio, worked together; and in such harmony, that Bandini probably often does what Sandro wants, better than Sandro could have done it himself; and, on the other hand, there is no design of Bandini's over which Sandro does not seem to have had influence.

And wishing now to show you three examples of the finest work of the old, the renaissance, and

the modern schools,—of the old, I will take Baccio Bandini's *Astrologia*, Plate III., opposite. Of the renaissance, Durer's Adam and Eve. And of the modern, this head of the daughter of Herodias, engraved from Luini by Beaugrand, which is as affectionately and sincerely wrought, though in the modern manner, as any plate of the old schools.

129. Now observe the progress of the feeling for light and shade in the three examples.

The first is nearly all white paper; you think of the outline as the constructive element throughout.

The second is a vigorous piece of *white* and *black*—not of *light* and *shade*,—for all the high lights are equally white, whether of flesh, or leaves, or goat's hair.

The third is complete in *chiaroscuro*, as far as engraving can be.

Now the dignity and virtue of the plates is in the exactly inverse ratio of their fulness in *chiaroscuro*.

Bandini's is excellent work, and of the very highest school. Durer's entirely accomplished work, but of an inferior school. And Beaugrand's, excellent work, but of a vulgar and non-classical school.





III

"At ev'nin^g, from the top of Fesole."

And these relations of the schools are to be determined by the quality in the *lines*; we shall find that in proportion as the light and shade is neglected, the lines are studied; that those of Bandini are perfect; of Durer perfect, only with a lower perfection; but of Beaugrand, entirely faultful.

130. I have just explained to you that in modern engraving the lines are cut in clean furrow, widened, it may be, by successive cuts; but, whether it be fine or thick, retaining always, when printed, the aspect of a continuous line drawn with the pen, and entirely black throughout its whole course.

Now we may increase the delicacy of this line to any extent by simply printing it in grey colour instead of black. I obtained some very beautiful results of this kind in the later volumes of 'Modern Painters,' with Mr. Armytage's help, by using subdued purple tints; but, in any case, the line thus engraved must be monotonous in its character, and cannot be expressive of the finest qualities of form.

Accordingly, the old Florentine workmen constructed the line *itself*, in important places, of successive minute touches, so that it became a chain of delicate links which could be opened or closed

at pleasure.* If you will examine through a lens the outline of the face of this Astrology, you will find it is traced with an exquisite series of minute touches, susceptible of accentuation or change absolutely at the engraver's pleasure; and, in result, corresponding to the finest conditions of a pencil line drawing by a consummate master. In the fine plates of this period, you have thus the united powers of the pen and pencil, and both absolutely secure and multipliable.

131. I am a little proud of having independently discovered, and had the patience to carry out, this Florentine method of execution for myself, when I was a boy of thirteen. My good drawing-master had given me some copies calculated to teach me freedom of hand; the touches were rapid and vigorous,—many of them in mechanically regular zigzags, far beyond any capacity of mine to imitate in the bold way in which they were done. But I was resolved to have them, somehow; and actually facsimiled a considerable portion of the drawing in the Florentine manner, with the finest point I could

* The method was first developed in engraving designs on silver—numbers of lines being executed with dots by the punch, for variety's sake. For niello, and printing, a transverse cut was substituted for the blow. The entire style is connected with the later Roman and Byzantine method of drawing lines with the drill hole, in marble. See above, Lecture II., Section 70.

cut to my pencil, taking a quarter of an hour to forge out the likeness of one return in the zigzag which my master carried down through twenty returns in two seconds; and so successfully, that he did not detect my artifice till I showed it him,—on which he forbade me ever to do the like again. And it was only thirty years afterwards that I found I had been quite right after all, and working like Baccio Bandini! But the patience which carried me through that early effort, served me well through all the thirty years, and enabled me to analyze, and in a measure imitate, the method of work employed by every master; so that, whether you believe me or not at first, you will find what I tell you of their superiority, or inferiority, to be true.

132. When lines are studied with this degree of care, you may be sure the master will leave room enough for you to see them and enjoy them, and not use any at random. All the finest engravers, therefore, leave much white paper, and use their entire power on the outlines.

133. Next to them come the men of the Renaissance schools, headed by Durer, who, less careful of the beauty and refinement of the line, delight in its vigour, accuracy, and complexity. And the essential difference between these men and the moderns is

that these central masters cut their line for the most part with a single furrow, giving it depth by force of hand or wrist, and retouching, *not in the furrow itself, but with others beside it.** Such work can only be done well on copper, and it can display all faculty of hand or wrist, precision of eye, and accuracy of knowledge, which a human creature can possess. But the dotted or hatched line is not used in this central style, and the higher conditions of beauty never thought of.

In the Astrology of Bandini,—and remember that the Astrologia of the Florentine meant what we mean by Astronomy, and much more,—he wishes you first to look at the face: the lip half open, faltering in wonder; the amazed, intense, dreaming gaze; the pure dignity of forehead, undisturbed by terrestrial thought. None of these things could be so much as attempted in Durer's method; he can engrave flowing hair, skin of animals, bark of trees, wreathings of metal-work, with the free hand; also, with laboured chiaroscuro, or with sturdy line, he can reach expressions of sadness, or gloom, or pain, or soldierly strength,—but pure beauty,—never.

134. Lastly, you have the Modern school, deepen-

* This most important and distinctive character was pointed out to me by Mr. Burgess.

ing its lines in successive cuts. The instant consequence of the introduction of this method is the restriction of curvature; you cannot follow a complex curve again with precision through its urrow. If you are a dextrous ploughman, you can drive your plough any number of times along the simple curve. But you cannot repeat again exactly the motions which cut a variable one.* You may retouch it, energize it, and deepen it in parts, but you cannot cut it all through again equally. And the retouching and energizing in parts is a living and intellectual process; but the cutting all through, equally, a mechanical one. The difference is exactly such as that between the dexterity of turning out two similar mouldings from a lathe, and carving them with the free hand, like a Pisan sculptor. And although splendid intellect, and subtlest sensibility, have been spent on the production of some modern plates, the mechanical element introduced by their manner of execution always overpowers both; *nor can any plate of consummate value ever be produced in the modern method.*

135. Nevertheless, in landscape, there are two examples in your Reference series, of insuperable

* This point will be further examined and explained in the Appendix.

skill and extreme beauty: Miller's plate, before instanced, of the Grand Canal, Venice; and E. Goodall's of the upper fall of the Tees. The men who engraved these plates might have been exquisite artists; but their patience and enthusiasm were held captive in the false system of lines, and we lost the painters; while the engravings, wonderful as they are, are neither of them worth a Turner etching, scratched in ten minutes with the point of an old fork; and the common types of such elaborate engraving are none of them worth a single frog, pig, or puppy, out of the corner of a Bewick vignette.

136. And now, I think, you cannot fail to understand clearly what you are to look for in engraving, as a separate art from that of painting. Turn back to the 'Astrologia' as a perfect type of the purest school. She is gazing at stars, and crowned with them. But the stars are *black* instead of shining! You cannot have a more decisive and absolute proof that you must not look in engraving for *chiaroscuro*.

Nevertheless, her body is half in shade, and her left foot; and she casts a shadow, and there is a bar of shade behind her.

All these are merely so much acceptance of shade as may relieve the forms, and give value to the linear



IV.

"By the Springs of PARNASSUS."

portions. The face, though turned from the light, is shadowless.

Again. Every lock of the hair is designed and set in its place with the subtlest care, but there is no lustre attempted,—no texture,—no mystery. The plumes of the wings are set studiously in their places,—they, also, lustreless. That even their filaments are not drawn, and that the broad curve embracing them ignores the anatomy of a bird's wing, are conditions of design, not execution. Of these in a future lecture.*

137. The 'Poesia,' Plate IV., opposite, is a still more severe, though not so generic, an example; its decorative foreground reducing it almost to the rank of goldsmith's ornamentation. I need scarcely point out to you that the flowing water shows neither lustre nor reflection; but notice that the observer's attention is supposed to be so close to every dark touch of the graver that he will see the minute dark spots which indicate the sprinkled shower falling from the vase into the pool.

138. This habit of strict and calm attention, constant in the artist, and expected in the observer, makes all the difference between the art of Intellect, and of mere sensation. For every

* See Appendix, Article I.

detail of this plate has a meaning, if you care to understand it. This is Poetry, sitting by the fountain of Castalia, which flows first out of a formal urn, to show that it is not artless; but the rocks of Parnassus are behind, and on the top of them—only one tree, like a mushroom with a thick stalk. You at first are inclined to say, How very absurd, to put only one tree on Parnassus! but this one tree is the Immortal Plane Tree, planted by Agamemnon, and at once connects our Poesia with the Iliad. Then, this is the hem of the robe of Poetry,—this is the divine vegetation which springs up under her feet,—this is the heaven and earth united by her power,—this is the fountain of Castalia flowing out afresh among the grass,—and these are the drops with which, out of a pitcher, Poetry is nourishing the fountain of Castalia.

All which you may find out if you happen to know anything about Castalia, or about poetry; and pleasantly think more upon, for yourself. But the poor dunces, Sandro and Baccio, feeling themselves but 'goffi nell' arte,' have no hope of telling you all this, except suggestively. They can't engrave grass of Parnassus, nor sweet springs so as to look like water; but they can make a pretty damasked surface with ornamental leaves, and flowing lines,

and so leave you something to think of—if you will.

139. 'But a great many people won't, and a great many more can't; and surely the finished engravings are much more delightful, and the only means we have of giving any idea of finished pictures, out of our reach.'

Yes, all that is true; and when we examine the effects of line engraving upon taste in recent art, we will discuss these matters; for the present, let us be content with knowing what the best work is, and why it is so. Although, however, I do not now press further my cavils at the triumph of modern line engraving, I must assign to you, in few words, the reason of its recent decline. Engravers complain that photography and cheap woodcutting have ended their finer craft. No complaint can be less grounded. They themselves destroyed their own craft, by vulgarizing it. Content in their beautiful mechanism, they ceased to learn, and to feel, as artists; they put themselves under the order of publishers and printsellers; they worked indiscriminately from whatever was put into their hands,—from Bartlett as willingly as from Turner, and from Mulready as carefully as from Raphael. They filled the windows of printsellers, the pages of gift books, with elaborate rubbish, and piteous abortions of

delicate industry. They worked cheap, and cheaper,—smoothly, and more smoothly,—they got armies of assistants, and surrounded themselves with schools of mechanical tricksters, learning their stale tricks with blundering avidity. They had fallen—before the days of photography—into providers of frontispieces for housekeepers' pocket-books. I do not know if photography itself, their redoubted enemy, has even now ousted them from that last refuge.

140. Such the fault of the engraver,—very pardonable; scarcely avoidable,—however fatal. Fault mainly of humility. But what has *your* fault been, gentlemen? what the patrons' fault, who have permitted so wide waste of admirable labour, so pathetic a uselessness of obedient genius? It was yours to have directed, yours to have raised and rejoiced in, the skill, the modesty, the patience of this entirely gentle and industrious race;—copyist—with their *heart*. The common painter-copyists who encumber our European galleries with their easels and pots, are, almost without exception, persons too stupid to be painters, and too lazy to be engravers. The real copyists—the men who can put their soul into another's work—are employed at home, in their narrow rooms, striving to make their good work profitable to all men. And in their submission to the public taste they are

truly national servants as much as Prime Ministers are. They fulfil the demand of the nation; what, as a people, you wish to have for possession in art, these men are ready to give you.

And what have you hitherto asked of them?—Ramsgate Sands, and Dolly Vardens, and the Paddington Station,—these, I think, are typical of your chief demands; the cartoons of Raphael—which you don't care to see themselves; and, by way of a flight into the empyrean, the Madonna di San Sisto. And, literally, there are hundreds of cities and villages in Italy in which roof and wall are blazoned with the noblest divinity and philosophy ever imagined by men; and of all this treasure, I can, as far as I know, give you not *one* example, in line engraving, by an English hand!

Well, you are in the main matter right in this. You want essentially Ramsgate Sands and the Paddington Station, because there you can see yourselves.

Make yourselves, then, worthy to be seen for ever, and let English engraving become noble as the record of English loveliness and honour.

28 GEN 18 '6

